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ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF ADULT KOREAN EFLS

by

Ikran Ali

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

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Capstone Project Facilitator: Karen Moroz

Content Expert: Heeyeon Sirny

DEDICATION

To my loving family and friends for your never-ending encouragement and support. A special thanks to 존경하는 Sirny 선생님, who sparked my interest in the Korean language and led me to research the current topic.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As an individual who has played the role of both a teacher and a student in a language learning setting, I am no stranger to the difficulties that students face on their path to language proficiency. From the perspective of a teacher, I had the opportunity to learn about the obstacles students face during my time working with mostly immigrant and refugee adults in an English as a Second Language (ESL) setting here in Minnesota. As a student, during my middle school and high school years learning Spanish and then during these past few years learning Korean, I was able to firsthand experience the role of a language learner. Interestingly enough, I learned quite a lot about English, my first language (L1), through the process of studying another language, more specifically Korean. These experiences solidified my previous belief that language educators should at some point study another language to put themselves in the shoes of their students and experience what their students experience. I had the chance to experience how it feels to be a native English speaker learning Korean as a second language (L2), and as a language educator this made me naturally curious about the experiences and obstacles faced by someone in the exact opposite situation: a native Korean speaker learning English as their L2.

This capstone will focus on the following questions:

- 1) What obstacles may hinder adult Korean English as a foreign language (EFL) students from improving their communicative competence?

- 2) What are strategies to enhance English communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I will describe my personal connection to the topic and what led to my decision to study communicative competence of Korean EFLs learning English. In addition, I will share my rationale for doing this project and how this project can help guide other educators in similar teaching contexts. Finally, I will outline the rest of my project.

Personal Connection

Starting from a young age, I have always been interested in languages. As early as elementary school, I remember assisting my immigrant parents with filling out forms, translating for them at doctor's appointments and even helping my mother complete her homework assignments for her GED courses. Some may have considered those tasks too burdensome for a child to take on, but I see them as my introduction to the world of language teaching and learning.

As a child, I was bilingual in both Somali and English, with Somali being the language I used with my parents or other Somalis and English being the language I used most often in my interactions with peers and the outside world. My first experience with learning a third language was in junior high school where all students were required to take a foreign language. We had the option to choose which one out of three languages we would take and I chose Spanish. I remember taking Spanish class and enjoying it at

first but very early on losing all motivation. I would continue to take Spanish courses all throughout high school, only studying not because of the joy of learning the language, but because of my desire to receive good grades. Soon after graduating, I forgot nearly all of the Spanish I had learned over those seven years. During high school, I never used any of my Spanish language skills outside of school. Once I stopped taking Spanish classes, any and all exposure I had to the Spanish language disappeared, which unfortunately resulted in me losing all of the Spanish language skills I had acquired during those seven years in a relatively short period of time.

My experiences with learning Korean are overall much more positive compared to my experiences with learning Spanish. I began learning Korean as an undergraduate student, not because it was a requirement but because I wanted to be able to watch Korean movies and shows without needing to turn on the English subtitles. Unlike Spanish, with Korean I had a specific goal and I believe as a result, I have been able to stay motivated on my path to Korean fluency. As a Korean learner here in the US, I have also had the opportunity to interact with many Koreans who are learning English in Korea. One thing I noticed in my interactions with those individuals is that many would express how they had been learning English since elementary school but they still had trouble interacting with native English speakers. It wasn't just one or two Koreans who informed me of their frustration with the English education system in Korea, but it was a pattern I noticed where many Koreans, mostly adults, would express their dissatisfaction with the English communication skills they acquired, or their lack thereof, during all those years they spent studying English in school. As both an English language educator and a Korean learner, I naturally became intrigued by this and I wanted to research more

into why so many Koreans who are learning English experience the same struggle of improving their English communicative competency while living in Korea, a country where English education is said to be taken very seriously.

Current Study

In Korea, English education is said to be rooted in keeping up with the developments in information technology and globalization, as well as the demanding competition involved in gaining a place in a Korean university (Cho, 2004). Korean students begin English education in elementary school and continue until even after college when many companies require their employees to enroll in English classes. In school, where students are taking an English course as a requirement, receiving a good grade is crucial in the competitive atmosphere and students study only for the test. To prepare their students, teachers focus on teaching the textbook and most of the language instruction is on grammar and reading. As a result, even though students take English classes several days a week, rarely any of that time is devoted to practicing speaking the language, therefore hindering them from improving their overall English communicative competency (Cho, 2004).

Although there is abundant research on the English education system in Korea, there doesn't seem to be as much research on the obstacles students face in improving their English communicative skills and what students can do to enhance their communicative competence in light of those obstacles. Korean students spend countless years and even money studying English, but there is still a major discrepancy especially in communication skills when comparing the amount of time and money spent on English

education (Kim, 2019). One reason for this discrepancy can be the teaching methods used in the English programs (Kim, 2001). In the classroom, it is important for teachers to use approaches that increase student exposure to the target language as well as require the students to produce much more language output. It is also important for language instructors to consider extralinguistic factors like learning attitudes and motivation that play a large role in second language acquisition.

“Communicative competence” is a term introduced by linguist and anthropologist Hymes. Hymes’ proposed theory of communicative competence is used to account for the knowledge that speakers and listeners have (and their ability to use that knowledge) in order to communicate appropriately in different social contexts (Hymes, 1972).

Communicative competence highlights several key important points, one being that the ability to speak and understand a language is not based solely on one’s grammatical knowledge of that language (Lillis, 2006). Hymes (1972) described grammatical competence as being one of the four sub-components of communicative competence - the other three are sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. For the purposes of this project, I will be focusing on sociolinguistic and strategic competence, which focus on the appropriateness of language use and the ability to repair breakdowns in communication.

Professional Significance

Although the focus of my project is researching English communicative competence of Korean EFLs, I believe the information I gather and the suggestions I propose in this study can be applied to EFL learners in other countries as well. There are

certainly differences between an EFL learner in Korea and an EFL learner in Brazil, but there will also be similarities as well. I believe language instructors and language learners alike both in EFL contexts and non-EFL contexts will be able to find useful information that could assist them or their learners in both understanding what might be hindering them or their students from improving their English communication skills and finding ways to overcome those obstacles. As an English educator myself, I plan on moving abroad to teach English and I believe this project will help me and other educators working in Korea and other similar contexts in understanding how to best help students enhance their English communicative competence.

Summary and Chapter Overviews

My passion for language education and my interest in learning Korean have led me to researching ways that my Korean counterparts can more effectively improve their English communication skills. It has led me to focus on the my research questions:

- 1) What obstacles may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence?
- 2) What are strategies to enhance English communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

In this chapter, I shared what led to my decision to study this research topic, my rationale for doing this project and how this project can help other educators and language learners in similar contexts. Chapter 2 will discuss and review the literature on communicative competence and the English education system in Korea. Chapter 3 will

discuss the project and the methods used to research the topic. Chapter 4 will analyze the results of the review and chapter 5 will provide the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine the difficulties adult Korean English learners residing in their native homeland face while learning the English language and use those findings to suggest best practices for both EFL instructors and their students in improving their English oral communication skills. The results of this study will be beneficial to both Korean and non-Korean EFL students, as well as other English language learners and instructors whose students may be experiencing similar difficulties or are looking for ways to improve their English speaking proficiency. To achieve this goal, in this project I examine the following questions:

- 1) What obstacles may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence? and
- 2) What are strategies to enhance English communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

This chapter examines the current literature on English education and the experiences of adult Korean EFLs in relation to the research questions. First, the four basic communication skills of English (listening, reading, writing and speaking) in relation to language learning are discussed. The next section examines Hymes' notion of communicative competence and its role in second language acquisition. The third section describes the English language learning process of adult Korean language learners living in Korea. The final section discusses the existing gap in the current literature.

Communication Skills in English

In the English learning classroom, the four basic communication skills students learn are the skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Instructors can integrate the instruction of these skills in the classroom, but they are often taught in isolation, which is not reflective of language use in the real world where multiple skills intersect in meaningful communication (Hinkel, 2006). In the following sections, I summarize these four skills and their usage in relation to English language acquisition of adults.

Listening

Listening refers to the complex process that allows us to understand spoken language (Rost, 2001; Tarone, 2005). Listening is considered to be the most used yet most overlooked skill in language teaching (Burns & Siegel, 2017). Like the other skills, it is used most often in conjunction with reading, writing and speaking skills. In second language teaching, a search for more effective teaching strategies for teaching listening has led many researchers and instructors alike to focus on the activation of learners' top-down and bottom-up knowledge (Burns & Siegel, 2017; Hinkel, 2006). Top-down listening refers to listeners looking at the 'big picture', i.e. listeners using their knowledge of the situation or context to understand what they are hearing. Bottom-up listening, on the other hand, refers to the process of listeners relying more on the smaller details, like individual words and sentences, to understand what is being said. In fluent listening, learners rely on both top-down and bottom-up listening skills to decipher what is being said in a variety of contexts, which is why students benefit most from instruction on both listening strategies (Hinkel, 2006).

Reading

Like listening, reading is another skill that involves the acquisition of top-down and bottom-up processing skills. Reading is viewed by many as being the most important skill in academic learning, with the perception that the more a learner reads the more their reading skills will improve (Burns & Siegel, 2017). This is not necessarily true, however, as even after many years of schooling and exposure to reading, not all learners become proficient L2 readers (Hinkel, 2006). In order to improve their reading skills, learners need instruction on appropriate reading strategies. Teachers need to provide instruction on metacognitive (planning how to approach a text, estimating what one already knows about the text, and monitoring comprehension) and cognitive (skimming, scanning, reading for gist) strategies that will allow students to both gain confidence in reading and increase their use over time (Burns & Siegel, 2017).

Reading is a skill that also goes hand-in-hand with vocabulary as knowledge of vocabulary plays a large role in reading comprehension. Especially in the realm of L2 teaching, learners need acquisition of a substantial amount of vocabulary to achieve not only reading comprehension, but writing, speaking and listening comprehension as well (Coady & Huckin, 1997).

Writing

As late as the 1970s, writing was not considered a language skill that needed to be taught to language learners (Reid, 2001). According to Reid (2001), the shift to the study of writing techniques and strategies began with teachers' realization of English L2

students' needs in the academic environment. Writing refers to the composition of a text and is a skill that, when paired with reading, makes up one of the two basic communication skills that are fundamental in academic learning (Burns & Siegel, 2017). A language learner with advanced writing skills will demonstrate a variety of skills including linguistic and textual knowledge, strategic knowledge and sociocultural awareness (Burns & Siegel, 2017). Like other skills, learners need knowledge of both top-down and bottom-up processing skills to become proficient L2 writers.

Speaking

Compared to the other basic communication skills, speaking can be considered one of the most complex skill areas for a learner to acquire. While speaking, learners need to attend to several things like context, discourse, information structuring and pronunciation, all while both speaking and comprehending at the same time (Tarone, 2005; Barton, 2013). In addition, learners are not given time to prepare beforehand and instead must produce language on the spot in real time. This is often why speaking can cause anxiety for L2 learners (Burns & Siegel, 2017).

In order to develop speaking competence, learners must acquire knowledge of the language systems, which includes knowing the sounds and intonation patterns, and the different genres of discourse which will allow them to create meaningful interactions (Burns & Siegel, 2017). In speaking, fluency, accuracy and a sufficient vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are all requirements for meaningful communication to take place (Hinkel, 2006). Going one step further, speakers need pragmatic and intercultural knowledge in order to respond appropriately and engage with others from different

cultures (Burns & Siegel, 2017). This is especially important for English learners as English is sometimes referred to as the ‘lingua franca’ of the world and is often used as a means of communication between people who speak different languages as their L1.

Communicative Competence

“Communicative competence” is a term used to describe the knowledge that speakers and listeners have in order to communicate appropriately in different social contexts (Lillis, 2006). The term was introduced by linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes in the late 1960s. Hymes’ introduction of communicative competence came after Noam Chomsky’s use of the term ‘linguistic competence’ which focused more on the abstract knowledge of linguistic structures. Hymes used communicative competence to support the following positions on language use (Hymes, 1962; Hymes, 1971; Lillis, 2006):

- The ability to use a language well involves knowing how to use language appropriately in any given context.
- Grammatical knowledge does not solely determine one’s ability to speak and understand language.
- The criteria for appropriate language varies depending on the context and can involve a range of modes.
- Learning what counts as appropriate occurs through socialization through participation in particular communities.

Chomsky used the term ‘linguistic competence’ to describe a speaker’s implicit knowledge of the grammatical rules in their native language (Chomsky, 1957; Chomsky,

1965). Chomsky argued that that knowledge allowed speakers to create new grammatical sentences and explains how speakers can recognize grammatically incorrect and correct sentences (Lillis, 2006). Hymes responded to Chomsky's linguistic competence with communicative competence-- a much more encompassing notion that would account for more than just grammatical knowledge. Hymes' communicative competence accounts for both knowledge and ability for use (Rydell, 2018). In other words, a speaker must possess much more than just grammatical knowledge of their language. Along with grammatical knowledge, speakers must know what is communicatively appropriate in any given context.

Adult Korean EFLs

In South Korea, many adults learn English as a foreign language for academic or workplace reasons (Park, 2011; Park, 2009). University students take private lessons in an effort to improve their English language skills so they become employed, and those who are already employed enroll in English classes to increase their chances at promotion (Choi, 2002; Park, 2009). The role of the English language in South Korea extends beyond college and the workplace and can be seen as playing a role in the globalization of Korea and the overall education system starting from elementary school, which both impact the adult Korean English learner's experience.

Globalization in Korea

English language education is taken very seriously in South Korea and the obsession surrounding English education has even been labeled as "English fever" (Park,

2009). Although Koreans had access to English education for much over a century, it wasn't until the late 1980s- early 1990s that English became such an important subject of education in Korea. This is due to both globalization in the 90s and the Korean financial crisis of 1997, which are said to have made Koreans realize how much the English language was valued in globalization (Park, 2009). The English language allowed Koreans to be more connected with the world and even attain more economic prosperity. As a result of this realization, for the first time early English education became an important issue and parents began rushing to get their children the best English education they could, often sending them to study language programs abroad or enrolling them in the best private schools money could afford (Park, 2009).

Competitiveness also plays a large role in the English language boom in Korea. The importance of English language education in the Korean education system was further emphasized by the Korean government which encouraged international competitiveness in universities, which came to see enhancing students' English competence as a crucial part of their preparation for their future careers (Park, 2009). This competition that was encouraged by the government led to universities requiring students to reach a certain score on standardized English tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) for the college entrance and exit exams (Cho, 2004; Park, 2009).

Competition between students in English language skills doesn't end in university. Park (2009) further explains how applicants for major corporations and employees looking for promotion are often screened for their English skills, leading to competition between applicants and employees. This is the case, even though studies have shown that

English is rarely used on the job except for specific jobs which deal with foreigners (Choi, 2002; Park, 2011). In the job market, those employed and those seeking employment are able to compete with others by taking English courses to improve their English language skills (Park, 2011).

English Education from a Young Age

The competition between fellow Koreans and English can also be observed in elementary schools where Korean students first begin learning English. Cho (2004) explains in detail how the Korean English education system looks at each educational level. In elementary school, children learn English for four years where they are mostly exposed to different aspects of English language and culture. This is followed by three years of English education in middle school and three more years in high school, where they focus on preparing for entrance into higher education where gaining a good exam score is extremely crucial. This emphasis on English education and the importance of college entrance exams has led to English instructors “teaching to take the test”, i.e. placing more emphasis on memorizing vocabulary, reading and grammar, or “textbook English”, than spoken English (Cho, 2004). Many students also lack access to native English speaking teachers, which along with the “teaching to test” English language instruction, results in students having very few opportunities to actually develop their speaking and communication skills (Park 2011). In schools, more emphasis is placed on language input than producing language output.

In a rush to get their children the best English education money could offer, many parents turn to private education. This is often due to the fact that many parents and

children believe that English education in the public sector does not meet their needs (Su, 2005). Park (2009) mentions that this could also be due to the parent's distrust towards the public education system, which they believe failed to help them grow into more proficient English speakers. Parents invest large amounts of money into private cramming schools (*hagwon*), private tutoring, English summer camps and study abroad programs where students attend from early morning to late at night studying English. This expensive investment is still not considered efficient by many Koreans, as although Korea is one of the countries that spends the most money on English education, there is still a discrepancy between the cost and efficiency of the investment (Park, 2009).

Parents' high expectations for their children paired with the excruciatingly long hours spent in school also often results in students quickly losing interest and motivation in their English studies (Park, 2004). Both parents and students also have unrealistically high expectations, which can then lead to further loss of interest and self-confidence. This can especially be seen in students' university years where lack of motivation and interest leads to students failing to reach their full potential as English language learners (Niederhausser, 2012).

Gap in Current Literature

Some research has been done on the Korean education system and the role it plays in hindering students' English speaking proficiency. However, there is a gap in research related to finding strategies for students to improve their skills in light of those obstacles. This paper attempts to identify the obstacles that prevent adult Korean EFLs from

improving their speaking skills and offer students and EFL educators alike steps that can be taken to counteract these obstacles and enhance student speaking proficiency.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the current literature on the basic communication skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking in English and communicative competence as it relates to second language acquisition. The experiences of adult Korean EFL students were then examined. A discussion of the role of the English language in the globalization of Korea and its impact on the language learning experiences of adult Koreans was followed by an overview of the English education system to better understand the experiences of English learners. Finally, the gap in the current literature and the purpose of this paper were explained. In chapter three, the methods used in gathering and assessing research studies will be discussed in detail.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This systematic literature review is designed to explore the factors that hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their English speaking proficiency and suggest strategies that can be implemented by educators and students to overcome these obstacles. This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What obstacles may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence? and
- 2) What are strategies to enhance English communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the methods for collecting data for this study. The databases and resources used in this study are identified and the criteria for including or excluding studies are explained in detail.

Parameters for Data Collection

This research study includes individuals who are Korean as well as learners from other countries studying English as a foreign language. Initially, I had planned to only include studies that involve only adult Korean EFLs, but finding an adequate number of such studies proved to be much more difficult than I had initially anticipated. I collected

all of the studies I reference in this research through a select number of databases using a select number of search terms.

Databases

Using Hamline University's Bush Memorial Library website, I was able to collect a good selection of peer-reviewed articles. Through Hamline's Memorial Library website, I was able to search for articles using the following search engines: ERIC, Academic Search Premier and Education Full Text using EBSCO host, and JSTOR. In addition to these databases, I also consulted Google Scholar and Google, but mostly in cases where I found potentially promising articles using Hamline's Library website but the articles were not available for viewing.

Search terms

In my search for peer-reviewed articles, I began the search by using the terms "EFL" and "Adult Korean". I then replaced "EFL" with "second language" which resulted in more promising articles. I also searched using different combinations of terms including but not limited to "Korean university students" and "English communication skills", "second language english" and "adult Korean", and "Korea" and "communication skills". After collecting a handful of research articles, I refined the search terms to look for articles related to more specific topics using search terms such as motivation, willingness to communicate, learning attitudes, speaking proficiency, strategic competence and discourse competence.

Criteria for Inclusion

In my selection of the research studies, the studies I chose to include were all studies relating to the topic “English as a second language”. Initially, I was planning to only include studies and articles specifically about or relating to Korean EFL students, but I widened the scope of the research collection to include studies that involve EFL learners from other countries. This decision came as a result of my realization that EFL students outside of Korea also likely face similar problems that Korean EFL students face, so by including a few articles that study other groups of EFL students, I can find out more about the problems Korean students face and open the way for more possible solutions.

As this review is centered around English language learning in the EFL context, all of the studies included are also limited to this context. Although many of the articles are peer-reviewed, there are a few exceptions as I chose to not exclude articles for the sole reason being they were not peer-reviewed. One reason for this is that just because an article is not peer-reviewed does not mean that it does not present useful information for other researchers, educators and students. Some of the studies were conducted by Korean researchers and although not all were peer-reviewed, they were chosen based on the information they provided.

Approach to Appraisal

The goal of this study is to research and inform EFL educators and students about strategies to enhance student speaking proficiency in English. The studies chosen for review were assessed based on the guiding research questions and consist of a mix of

qualitative and quantitative research. Studies were considered based on the size and demographic of the population, as well as its connection to the guiding questions. Studies that were selected provided a glimpse into students' experiences while learning English as a foreign language and/or strategies for improving communicative competence in the EFL classroom.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the data collection methods and the criteria used in selecting studies for the review. Studies were chosen mainly based on their relevance to the guiding research questions and the overall topic of the research at hand. In chapter four, the results of the systematic review will be discussed and analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter examines the data obtained from the various research collected for this literature review. Numerous research articles, journals and papers relating to the topics of Korean EFL learners and English language acquisition were thoroughly analyzed and reviewed. Data collected was analyzed to answer the following guiding questions:

- 1) What obstacles may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence? and
- 2) What are strategies to enhance communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

This chapter aims to answer the second guiding question by offering suggestions to both teachers and students on strategies that can allow teachers to assist students with improving their English communicative competence. First, communicative strategies and their role in improving language proficiency are discussed. The benefits of implementing authentic materials in relation to enhancing learner communicative competence are then presented. Finally, the strategy of increasing the student affective factors of motivation, learning attitudes and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is assessed.

Teaching Communicative Strategies

Rabab'ah (2015) and Kim (2019) suggest one way to improve student's English communicative competence is by teaching students how to repair breakdowns in communication. Strategic competence, discourse competence, linguistic competence and sociolinguistic competence are all major sub-components of Hymes' notion of 'communicative competence' (Hymes, 1972). According to Hymes (1972), strategic competence relates to a speaker's ability to repair breakdowns in communication and make up for any linguistic deficiencies the speaker might have.

Rabab'ah's (2015) study looked at 124 male and female EFL students majoring in English at the University of Jordan who were native speakers of Arabic. In the study, the experimental group received explicit communicative strategy training whereas the control group did not. The instructor for both groups received training in seven oral communication strategies, which he then taught exclusively to the experimental group. Those communication strategies are *paraphrasing*, *appeal for help*, *asking for repetition*, *clarification request*, *confirmation request*, *self-repair* and *guessing*. The experimental group participated in several activities aimed at improving their strategic skills and strategy awareness. The study found that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the IELTS speaking test, which can be attributed to the communicative strategy training students received (Rabab'ah, 2015).

Kim's (2019) study looked at the communicative strategy preferences of ten Korean international students attending a college in Minnesota. The study found that all of the students use communication strategies and among the students who have learned the strategies, most of them learned it to help them speak English more fluently (Kim, 2019). Those who learned it agree that instruction in communication strategy is helpful

for improving English speaking skills and five agreed that students have to learn communication strategies. The study also found that the students generally used a mix of different strategies at once and had different preferences for using the strategies based on different contexts (Kim, 2019). For example, when participants were communicating with a professor, they preferred to use communication strategies like “circumlocution, approximation, nonlinguistic signals, and stalling or time-gaining strategies for successful communication” (Kim, 2019). On the other hand, Kim (2019) found that participants leaned towards using avoidance strategies when they were lacking confidence to complete the communication or they were avoiding an argument.

Teaching students communicative strategy also has an effect on learners’ Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (Mirsane & Khabiri, 2016). In their study, Mirsane and Khabiri (2016) found that after students received training in nine communicative strategies, their use of the strategies increased dramatically along with their willingness to communicate in English. Students also expressed how they no longer experienced fear or anxiety when communicating in English. An increase in students’ communicative strategy skills and a decrease in negative feelings like fear can help learners to avoid communicating in English less often.

Overall, the studies highlight the importance of teaching EFL students communicative strategies. Teaching learners communication strategies can help them improve their English speaking proficiency by equipping them with the skills needed to navigate and troubleshoot any breakdowns in communication that may arise (Rabab’ah, 2015; Kim, 2019). Furthermore, increasing students’ awareness of the strategies and their ability to use them can help to reduce some of the fear and anxiety they experience when

communicating in English. This can result in students seeking opportunities to communicate in English rather than avoiding them, allowing them to further improve their English speaking skills.

Authentic Materials

Another way to help learners improve their English communication skills is to provide authentic materials in the classroom (Su, 2007; Losada et al., 2017; Ozverir et al., 2017; Keshmirshekan, 2019). Authentic materials are learning materials that were designed for native speakers and contain real language that is not simplified for language teaching purposes (Gilmore, 2007; Losado et al., 2017). Keshmirshekan (2017) studied a group of 106 upper-intermediate English language learners aged 19-22 in a private language institute in Iran and found that authentic materials helped the EFL learners to develop their communicative competence. Furthermore, it made learners much more eager to learn as the authentic materials were very interesting to the students. Keshmirshekan (2017) suggests that using authentic materials is the most appropriate method for demonstrating authentic use of English for communication.

Losada et al.'s (2017) study of university students in Colombia showed similar findings on the use of authentic materials. Their study aimed to analyze the effect of authentic materials and tasks on the enhancement of the communicative competence of students attending a language school. The findings showed that the implementation of authentic materials and tasks had an impact on the students' communicative competence as well as the teaching practices of the teacher implementing the materials (Losada et al., 2017).

Similarly, Ozverir et al.'s (2017) study investigated the effects of authentic tasks in improving student communicative competence in English. Using a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, data was collected from students and teachers at an Egyptian university. The task was based on a scenario where students and the teachers were members of the City Newsletter editorial board. Students had to conduct research on a social issue, write an article and then present it orally. The researchers found that the authentic tasks provided students with multiple opportunities to use the target language in context, promoting the use of the target language and closing the gap between language use in the classroom and language use in the real world (Ozverir et al., 2017).

Authentic materials and learner motivation

As some of the previously mentioned studies have demonstrated, using authentic materials in the language classroom can enhance students' communicative competence by increasing student motivation (Su, 2007; Keshmirshekan, 2017; Lozada et al., 2017; Ozverir et al., 2017; Dinh, 2021). Losada et al. (2017) and Keshmirshekan (2017) found that the use of authentic materials in the classroom aided in increasing student motivation and overall attitude towards English language learning by providing students with opportunities for authentic language use.

Marzban and Davaji (2015) and Dinh (2021) studied the effectiveness of implementing authentic texts in raising student motivation in their language skills. Marzban and Davaji's (2015) study examined the use of online authentic texts in an English teaching institute and found that students' language proficiency increased and their motivation increased as well. After reading the authentic texts, students felt more

motivated to read about other topics in the target language and even deliver the new information they obtained from the text to other people (Marzban & Davaji, 2015).

Dinh's (2021) study looked specifically at the implementation of authentic acceptance speeches in the English language classroom and its effect on IELTS learners' motivation in their speaking skills. The participants in this study were five intermediate EFL learners in an IELTS training course who lacked confidence in their English speaking skills.

Learners were shown three acceptance speeches made by award-winning actors and were required to organize and classify the speeches. As a result of this activity, the researchers found that the speeches left an impression on the students and had increased their motivation to speak like the actors and produce short expressions confidently (Dinh, 2021).

Poetry is yet another authentic text that can be used in the classroom to promote English communicative competence. Aladini and Farahbod (2019) looked at the use of poetry in the EFL/ESL classroom and its effect on learner motivation. The findings showed that introducing poetry as an authentic material in the classroom not only makes language learning more meaningful, but it makes students more motivated and eager to actively participate in class activities. (Aladini & Farahbod, 2019).

In summary, the use of authentic materials in the language classroom has been found to increase students' English communicative competence by providing students with more opportunities for producing authentic language output (Keshmirshakan, 2017; Losada et al., 2017; Ozverir et al., 2017). As students became more exposed to authentic materials, their motivation and attitudes towards learning also improved, leading them to

seek more opportunities for language use outside of the classroom and further improve their language proficiency (Aladini & Farahbod, 2019; Dinh, 2021).

Affective Factors

As mentioned previously, it is well known that affective variables like motivation and learning attitudes play a major role in the language learning process. Being aware of the roles of student motivation and learning attitudes in the language classroom and taking active steps to increase them can help enhance learner communicative competence.

Motivation and learning attitudes

Kim (1990) and Kim (2003) both studied motivation in college students learning English as a foreign language in Korea. Kim's (2003) study looked at the relationship between motivation and English achievement for Korean students and supports previous research that Korean university students are highly extrinsically motivated and lacked internal motivation and enjoyment of learning English. In addition to their lack of pleasure and satisfaction while learning English, students are also more likely to feel stress towards English due to several factors such as parent expectations and the limited job market.

Kim (1990) supports the idea that success in second language learning largely depends on factors like learning attitudes and motivation. The purpose of the study was to assess how important learning attitudes and motivation are to the English language acquisition of Korean university students. The study found that the intensity of

motivation was positively related to the English proficiency of the college students and argues that motivational intensity is the most relevant factor in second language achievement (Kim, 1990). This suggests that the most successful learners are the ones who demonstrate high motivational intensity. Kim (1990) also argues that intensity of motivation is more crucial in this learning context than type of motivation or attitude.

Motivation is especially important for those who intend on studying a language long-term. Kim and Kim (2015) looked at the motivation of elderly Korean learners studying English as an EFL and investigated factors that affect their motivation. The study found that self-actualization was the most influential factor in the motivation of the elderly learners. This indicates that an immediate sense of enjoyment, satisfaction and achievement are all crucial for continued L2 learning (Kim & Kim, 2015). Factors of demotivation were also investigated in this study, and found that elderly learners with high expectations who have created an unattainable ideal L2 self are more likely to experience demotivation. This implies that learners should create an ideal L2 self that is attainable and teachers can best help learners achieve this by setting goals.

Willingness to Communicate

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is another factor that is related to motivation (Kim, 2004; Mirsane & Khabiri, 2016). Kim (2004) studied WTC in Korean undergraduate students taking English classes as required coursework at Korean universities. The study was designed to assess how willing Korean university students were to communicate in English and what might be affecting their WTC. The findings showed that Korean university students had low levels of WTC. Kim claims that

students' unsuccessful results in learning English can in part be attributed to their low levels of WTC and suggests language anxiety as being a major reason for the low WTC. In order to reduce anxiety in the language learning context, Niederhauser (1997) and Kim (2004) agree that learners must take risks to break the cycle and develop their language proficiency. Kim (2004) suggests that teachers build a secure learning environment and students learn the sources of language anxiety and how to control it.

Kim's (2004) study also showed that, although motivation and learning attitudes are not directly related to WTC, they are directly related to confidence, which is directly related to WTC. In other words, learning motivation and attitudes are directly related to each other and influence WTC through other variables like confidence. This suggests that a learner needs to be confident to be willing to communicate in English, and that confidence can come directly from motivation.

Chapter Summary

In summary, the research on communicative competence in EFL adult learners from Korea and other countries point to several steps that can be taken to enhance student communicative competence. These strategies include teaching students strategic competence, the implementation of authentic texts and tasks in the EFL classroom, increasing or improving student motivation and learning attitudes, and helping students become more willing to communicate by reducing language anxiety and increasing their confidence.

Research shows that students can greatly benefit from teachers implementing these strategies in the classroom and providing students with the skills necessary to

improve their communicative competence. Many of the strategies suggested happen to overlap, indicating that students will experience the most benefits from teachers implementing multiple strategies.

In this chapter, I presented the results of the systematic literature review. Chapter five will discuss the major findings of this study, implications and limitations of the research, and the method for communicating the results.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Overview of the Chapter

This systematic literature review collected and analyzed a large body of research in order to answer the following guiding questions:

1. What obstacles may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence? and
2. What are strategies to enhance communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

This final chapter will first present the major findings of the study. Next, limitations and implications of the current study will be discussed. Lastly, the methods that will be used for sharing this study will be presented.

My interest in researching this topic came from my interactions with adult Korean EFL learners. As an English educator and a Korean learner myself, I was interested in learning about the challenges faced by Koreans my age who were learning English, but I did not expect to compose an entire research paper on this topic. After I began looking into this topic, I realized that many Korean learners face the same challenges and decided to research strategies that could help adult Korean learners overcome any obstacles that may be hindering them from enhancing their English communicative competence. After some research, I came to the realization that the strategies mentioned in this research can further be applied to English learners in other contexts as well.

As an English educator with plans to teach English abroad in East Asia, since completing this systematic literature review I feel more equipped with the strategies and tools needed to assist adult English learners in improving their English communication skills. I have already begun implementing a few of the strategies with a group of students I currently teach and they have shown to be quite effective. Although the original purpose of this literature review was to serve as a guide for EFL educators, I believe that students will be able to gain useful knowledge as well.

Major Findings

The main purpose of this study was to research the obstacles that may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence and suggest strategies for educators and students to overcome those difficulties. Chapter two looked at answering the first guiding questions, and the second guiding question was the main point of research in chapter four. There is limited research on the specific topic of adult Korean EFLs and communicative competence, but the number of relevant studies increased considerably when the research lens was broadened to include studies about adult EFLs from other countries in which English is taught as a foreign language.

The research collected in this study suggested a few strategies that could be implemented in the EFL classroom to improve adult Korean learners' English communication skills and overall competence. Many of the strategies overlapped, implying that students will see the best results from the implementation of several strategies. One strategy that showed promising results was teaching learners communicative strategies. Kim (2019) and Rabab'ah (2015) showed that by teaching

students strategies for communication (e.g. paraphrasing, clarification request, confirmation request, appeal for help, guessing), not only do students' speaking performance improve, but their confidence and overall English proficiency improve as well as a result of their increased ability to better navigate and resolve breakdowns in communication. Equipping students with strategic skills also decreases student language anxiety, which leads to an increase in their Willingness to Communicate (WTC). This further results in students seeking English conversation rather than avoiding it, which provides adult Korean EFL students with more opportunities to improve their English speaking skills.

WTC is one factor that's also indirectly related to motivation. Kim (2004) demonstrated how low levels of WTC can make it more difficult for students to obtain successful results in learning. By increasing student motivation through methods such as building a secure learning environment and teaching students to recognize and manage language anxiety, students can see an increase in confidence in their English skills, which will lead to them becoming more willing to communicate with others in the target language. In other words, affective factors like motivation and learning attitudes of students should be a point of focus for educators who are looking to improve their learners' English communication skills.

The last major strategy that had a considerable amount of research supporting it was using authentic materials to improve student communicative competence in the classroom. Implementing authentic materials in the EFL classroom can allow students to use and be exposed to language use in real-world contexts, bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world, as shown by Ozverir et al. (2017). Like the previously

mentioned strategies, the implementation of authentic materials in the classroom is another method that has been shown to improve student motivation as well. Marzban and Davaji (2019) demonstrated how implementing authentic materials led to an increase in both student language proficiency and motivation. When students were taught using authentic materials, they felt more motivated to research more similar texts on their own and even share their new knowledge with others.

Limitations

The results of this systematic review were limited by several factors. One such factor was the wide range of age groups mentioned in the studies. Although most studies were about college students with ages generally ranging from late teens to mid-twenties, there were a few studies on elderly English students and high school students that were also referenced. Although the focus of this study was adult Korean EFLs, many of the studies collected and analyzed focused on other groups of ESL learners. This was mainly due to the limited research on adult Korean EFL learners. Nevertheless, those studies were included because through researching this topic, I realized that English learners from other countries also most likely face difficulties with improving their communicative competence. Therefore, although this review does include research about English learners outside of Korea in addition to research specifically about Korean learners, my belief is that this will allow more English educators and learners to relate to the issues mentioned in this study and feel more confident in applying the strategies suggested in this research in their own language learning contexts, regardless of whether they are teaching elderly students or college students.

Implications

The research has shown that implementing the three major strategies mentioned above can have a positive impact on enhancing student communicative competence. Studies have demonstrated how implementing authentic materials, teaching students strategic communication strategies and fostering student motivation are all connected and students will benefit from the implementation of more than one strategy.

In the case of adult Korean English learners who are more likely to feel stress towards English due to a variety of factors and have been shown to have low levels of WTC, introducing several of the strategies can provide students with the tools needed to improve their communication skills. For example, educators can use authentic materials as a means for improving student motivation. Instructors should first take time to learn more about each student and the reasons for which they are learning English, and then use this information as a guide for developing lessons that relate more to students interests and goals. By introducing authentic learning materials that the students find interesting and stimulating, students will feel more motivated to continue learning and may even eventually seek out more similar learning materials on their own time. Examples of learning materials include, poems, speeches, skits, shows, books, and so on. Introducing authentic materials that have the potential to increase student engagement and motivation are especially important in the case of long-term learners who have been proven to need the motivation to continue learning.

Teachers should also equip students with the tools needed to navigate English communication and repair any breakdowns in communication that may occur. Research

has shown that adult Korean learners tend to avoid communicating with native speakers, which is often due to low confidence levels. By teaching students communication strategies such as paraphrasing, self-repair, appeal for help, and guessing, students will be able to better respond to and resolve communication breakdowns rather than avoiding them altogether. Being equipped with these tools will allow Korean learners to feel more confident and willing to communicate, rather than feeling anxious and attempting to avoid communicating in English.

Communicating the Results

This research will be available in the Hamline Digital Commons. The hope is that the topics of adult Korean EFL learners and communicative competence covered in this review will be of interest to educators and students in the ESL field and more research will be dedicated to research on these topics moving forward.

Chapter Summary

Adult Korean English as a foreign language learners face many challenges when it comes to improving their English communication skills. In order to research these challenges and possible strategies that can help adult Korean learners overcome the challenges, this systematic literature review focused on answering the following guiding questions:

1. What obstacles may hinder adult Korean EFL students from improving their communicative competence? and

2. What are strategies to enhance communicative competence of adult Korean EFLs?

In this final chapter, I presented the major findings from the systematic literature review, discussed the implications and limitations, and shared how I plan to communicate the research findings.

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